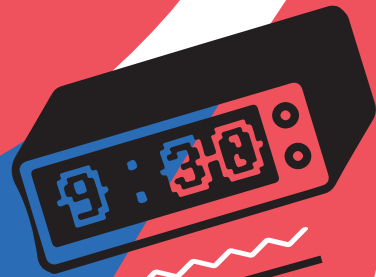


DISTRICT FFRAY

A LIFESTYLE + ENTERTAINMENT MAGAZINE

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CULTURE



THE DISTRICT'S NEW MUSES: WOMEN LEADERS

OF D.C. ART SPACES The Muses were the Greek goddesses of the arts, literature, sciences and humanities. Their home: the museum. The Muses were abstract personifications, idealized gods – not creating art themselves, but rather inspiring male poets, scientists and historians. But not anymore, and definitely not in D.C. **WORDS BY COLLEEN KENNEDY**

“There’s a shake-up happening,” says Kristi Maiselman, executive director of CulturalDC. “Exciting things are happening.”

In a recent *Washington Post* article, Peggy McGlone pointed out the recent “flurry of landmark appointments” within the Smithsonian Institution as women became the directors of some of the world’s most renowned museums for the first time: Ellan Stofan at Smithsonian’s National Air and Space Museum, Anthea Hartig at Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History, and Kim Sajet at Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery. Kaywin Feldman was appointed the first female director of the National Gallery of Art in March 2019, and Heran Sereke-Brhan is the acting executive director of the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities. They are the latest in an already robust representation of women leaders in the District’s art scene.

“D.C. is unique,” explains Allison Nance, director of International Arts & Artists (IA&A) at Hillyer. “This is not the norm. It’s empowering looking at the leadership landscape of D.C. It’s so important to have women in these positions to show their capabilities.”

These capabilities extend to many regional arts organizations, collectives and galleries helmed by women leaders, too. Speaking with several of these trailblazers, we see there is a strong sense of collaborations – often with other women-run organizations and businesses – and a focus on women working together to not only create art but to forge space for arts and artists, and to reflect their communities.

CREATING COMMUNITIES

IA&A at Hillyer is a nonprofit arts organization that creates global communities by exhibiting local and regional artists alongside international talents in its three-room gallery. Partnering with embassies and international arts organizations, IA&A provides visa application help for international artists for travel exhibitions and programming throughout several major U.S. cities in addition to D.C. This includes sending several artists to Seoul before a May exhibit featuring contemporary Korean films in partnership with the Korean Cultural Center and the Smithsonian’s Korean Film Festival.

But it’s important to make the global local, too. IA&A produces over 80 public programs a year based on current exhibitions and topical themes, working with a wide range of organizations throughout the District such as the DC Public Library, the Middle East Institute, and MAP: Media & Arts for Peace (founded by Honey Al Sayed). Programming reflects the diversity of D.C., including a recent Spanish-language mixer cohosted with Conversational D.C. to celebrate the art of Barcelona arts duo Amarist. Nance hopes to offer future non-Anglophone events, including an Arabic-language event during the exhibit of Lebanese artist Yasmine Dabbous.

Amy Moore, executive director of Capitol Hill Arts Workshop (CHAW), knows all about building community through the arts. CHAW makes sure that social and economic barriers do not keep people from engaging in the arts. Moore has seen firsthand the power of communal artmaking: afterschool arts programs, affordable – and often free – art workshops and classes, performing arts spaces such as Taffety Punk Theatre Company and Light Switch Dance Company, creative partnerships to reach community members as underserved as women in correctional facilities, to name a few.

Moore explains, “When you make art with other people, you

are open, taking risks. It engenders us to really listen, to become closer to a community. We learn compassion and about complex issues, and by working together creatively, we make sure we are all uplifted.”

Nance notes the amount of different cultures within our D.C. community: “Art has a soft power, creating an opportunity to learn about and from other cultures in a nonconfrontational way.”

Check out three solo exhibitions celebrating Women’s History Month at Hillyer throughout March: 9 Hillyer Ct. NW, DC; www.athillyer.org. Don’t miss “Mother’s Aguayo,” a photographic exploration of motherhood, womanhood and the aguayo (a traditional Bolivian carrying cloth) from March 9- 28 at **Capitol Hill Arts Workshop**: 545 7th St SE, DC; www.chaw.org.

THE POWER OF ART

The “power” of art includes the ability to heal. Lindsey Yancich, gallery manager for the Joan Hisaoka Healing Arts Gallery, plans the exhibits and programming for the Smith Center for Healing and the Arts.

“All of the exhibitions have to do with the process of healing through making and seeing art,” Yancich explains.

This includes an annual exhibit of artists who have made the journey through their cancer. Programming includes workshops as simple but as therapeutic and meditative as knitting for patients in hospitals around the District.

“Making art is a gift. To utilize that tool for healing is something everyone is capable of. Everyone has the ability to create – that’s where healing comes in.”

Running until March 14, see “Material Woman: The Power of the Feminine Hand” featuring many pieces of tactile works

created in a circle of women at the **Joan Hisaoka Healing Arts Gallery**: 1632 U St. NW, DC; www.joanhisaoakagallery.org.

MAKING SPACE FOR ART

Hen House, a collective exhibiting the works of women, trans and nonbinary artists cofounded by Tiffany Evans, Kathrine Campagna and Beth Hansen, creatively collaborates for exhibition space. Currently teaming up with ANXO Cidery & Pintxos Bar for two Women’s History Month exhibits, Campagna explains that the partnership came together naturally.

“I’ve known Rachel [Fitz, co-owner of ANXO] from bartending when I still worked at Red Derby.”

Their third exhibit “DUALITY,” showcasing 23 artists with related events and workshops, is at Union Market through April 15. The artists of “DUALITY” were challenged to consider this theme in respect to femininity, race, religion, science and the banal. This show offers women, trans and nonbinary artists the opportunity to explore their own dual nature through visual art.

CulturalDC has been making space for art for two decades, facilitating between developers and artists and making sure that cultural connections are an important aspect of new properties.

Maiselman notes, “It’s always been women. For 20 years, it’s been an organization run by women. The world of developers is still primarily male.”

Atlas Performing Arts Center, Brookland Artspace Lofts and the artist studios at Monroe Street Market in Brookland are all examples of their Artspace Development programming, linking community-minded real estate developers to the arts.

In addition, Source Theatre on 14th Street and the Mobile Art Gallery are two of the organization’s successes in making art accessible, showing what investments in the arts means to D.C.’s different neighborhoods.

“The Mobile Art Gallery takes the art to the people. We present a diverse group of regional and national artists that reflect the community we live in to create dialogues,” Maiselman says.

The Mobile Art Gallery will be at Union Market through March 22 for “Rendition” by Zoë Charlton, a multimedia exhibit of “mass-produced” collectible African masks and statues that humorously engages with commodification and cultural tokenism.

All of these vanguards of D.C.’s art scene explain that their leadership is bolstered by women working together through women-led boards, bouncing ideas around with each other, offering much-needed checks and balances, or pushing for newer, bigger, bolder projects. Hen House, for example, is dreaming up a Fine Arts Carnival for the summer.

Campagna explains, “It’s a carnival for the whole community: a big daytime festival with music, paintings, sculptures and [engagement] with the arts.”

Yancich concludes, “There is something special about coming together with other women. It’s safe. And we lift each other up. I learn something new every day, and every day, I can give something back.”

Don’t miss Hen House’s two exhibits in celebration of Women’s History Month throughout March at **ANXO Restaurant & Pintxos Bar**: 300 Florida Ave. NW, DC and **ANXO Cidery & Tasting Room**: 711 Kennedy St. NW, DC. Follow them on Instagram @henhousedc. Learn more about CulturalDC’s Mobile Arts Gallery at www.culturaldc.org/mobile-arts.

CELEBRATE WOMEN IN THE ARTS

THE BEARDED LADY PROJECT

Head to the National Museum of Natural History through April 19 for this traveling exhibition of black-and-white portraits taken by Kelsey Vance of female paleontologists sporting fake beards to challenge public perception of what a scientist looks like. Through April 19. *10th Street & Constitution Avenue in NW, DC*; www.naturalhistory.si.edu

HEARTS OF OUR PEOPLE: NATIVE WOMEN ARTISTS

Renwick Gallery is hosting this landmark exhibition, the first major thematic exhibition to explore the artistic achievements of Native women, with 82 artworks from antiquity to the present focusing on the power of the collaborative spirit. Through May 17.

1661 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, DC; www.americanart.si.edu/visit/renwick

I AM...CONTEMPORARY WOMEN ARTISTS OF AFRICA

The Smithsonian National Museum of African Art’s permanent collection will showcase 27 featured artists in a variety of media. Through July 5. *950 Independence Ave. SW, DC*; <https://africa.si.edu>

HER STORY: A CENTURY OF WOMEN WRITERS

The National Portrait Gallery will highlight over 20 noted women writers from the last 100 years who are represented in the gallery’s collection. The authors featured have collectively won every literary award there is, and many of their titles have become classics of American literature. Opens July 10.

8th & F Streets in NW, DC; www.npg.si.edu

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF WOMEN IN THE ARTS

Women to Watch

“By looking at both emerging artists who are early in their career as well as those who may have been working artists for a long time but have not received more national attention, these exhibitions are a unique mix of artists who all work in the same medium,” says associate curator Virginia Treanor. “By organizing the exhibition around a particular medium – in this case paper – the works inherently have something in common. Beyond that, however, their wide variety of differences in size, shape and color is what makes an exhibition like this so visually interesting.”

#5WomenArtists

“Each March, during Women’s History Month, we have an even bigger platform for celebrating women artists and influencing fellow museums to think about gender equity in their institutions,” says Amy Mannarino, director of communications and marketing. “Starting in 2016, we decided to use this platform to launch the #5WomenArtists campaign, encouraging cultural organizations and interested individuals to share information and art by women. This year, #5WomenArtists is recognizing how women are using art to make change and drive awareness about globally relevant issues. We are asking museums, galleries, and other cultural institutions to share art and information about artists who explore key social issues, including gender equity, immigration, LGBTQ rights, racial justice, and climate change.”

| From June 26 to September 7. *1250 New York Ave. NW, DC*; www.nmwa.org